

(MYTHS, from page 15)

lives conform to the unreality of the myth.

The "necessary lie" of the myth of romantic love does not ensure the survival of the species in gay couples, so the myth's one potential virtue is negated. Nonetheless, the issue is as much a problem in non-procreative relationships as it is in procreative ones, and is a major problem for most of the gay men and women I know. If the myth of romantic love is another negative reason, no positive support came forth from the 190 gay individuals Silverstein interviewed, and it's rare to encounter them in gay circles.

MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WASTE VAST
AMOUNTS OF ENERGY...ATTEMPTING TO
MAKE THE REALITY OF THEIR LIVES
CONFORM TO THE UNREALITY OF THE MYTH

These are very real problems. If one reads Peck's book with this question in mind, you can find at least three reasons to support fidelity in [gay] relationships. First, once a relationship has passed the falling-in-love and there's-still-stars-in-my-eyes stages, the individuals begin to realize that they are not "one" with the beloved, that the other person is not who they were fantasized to be, and that "the beloved has and will continue to have his or her own desires, tastes, prejudices, and timing different from the other's. One by one, gradually or suddenly, the ego boundaries snap back into place; gradually or suddenly, they fall out of love.... At this point they begin either to dissolve the ties of the relationship or to initiate the work of real loving."

It is precisely this point where so many gay people are arrested; just when the work of building a relationship should begin, off goes Juliet or Romeo on her charger looking for the next myth. Even if a couple decides to "open" their relationship, the primary relationship suffers because energy is not being directed to create a better relationship.

The second reason is an outgrowth of this problem. Peck states that, "Ultimately, if they stay in therapy, all couples learn that a true acceptance of their own and each other's individuality is the only foundation upon which a mature marriage [=relationship] can be based and real love can grow." If we keep breaking up when these individualities are first realized, we are prevented from every grasping this truth, that the strength of a relationship is based on each partner's independence and separateness.

Third, sexual fidelity is a direct symbol for each partner's commitment to their relationship. Peck believes that:

Commitment is inherent in any genuine loving relationship. Anyone who is truly concerned for the spiritual

growth of another knows, consciously or unconsciously, that he or she can significantly foster that growth only through a relationship of constancy. ...Couples cannot resolve in any healthy way the universal issues of marriage [=coupling]--dependency and independency, dominance and submission, freedom and fidelity, for example--without the security of knowing that the act of struggling over these issues will not destroy the relationship.

Every gay person who has been involved in a relationship knows the experience of being insecure about broaching difficult issues because of the fear of losing the other partner. The stresses of third-party sex and the pressures they add to a relationship that needs work serve to undermine the vital perception of constancy.

I admitted at the beginning that I was a bit conservative about these issues, and I think that the "no rules" freedom advocated by some isn't going to help create gay individuals who feel positive about themselves and their potential for forming lasting relationships that nurture growth. Peck's book is a help. He doesn't specifically address gay issues, but there's a lot there to make you think about who you are now and why, who you are becoming, and how your past will color your future.

One of the goals of gay liberation is the freedom to be emotionally healthy. The freedom to be promiscuous is also a freedom that must be safeguarded, but its consequences for the ways gay people treat relationships must be acknowledged. When gay people come out they often experience a valuable period of sexual exploration which compensates for the talk our parents never gave us on how to make love to someone of the same sex and all those dry years. But if we never try to learn how to build lasting relationships along the way, our arrested development will be our own creation.

-Bill

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